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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

8 February 1985

Mr. John R. Silber
President
Boston University
147 Bay State Road
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

Dear Mr. Silber,

Your excellent article in today's Wall Street Journal, "Plain Talk Behind Closed Doors in Central America," prompts me to write this letter. We met some time ago when you were in this building to attend a series of meetings organized by the Director for college presidents. At that time, I was very much taken by what you said--and also by the way you said it. Since that time, I have kept up with you through your speeches, writings, and occasional appearances on television. I continue to be impressed. Now I am using the excuse of today's article to open a line of communication. If you are coming to Washington any time soon, perhaps we can get together for a breakfast, lunch, or dinner. If you will not be in Washington in the foreseeable future, no doubt I can find an excuse to visit Boston. You can reach my office by calling [redacted] STAT

I look forward to hearing from you, and even more to sitting down and talking with you.

Sincerely yours,

Herbert E. Meyer
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

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Plain Talk Behind Closed Doors in Central America

The Americas

by John R. Silber

Distorting history is one of the most common tactics of Leninist governments: According to their doctrine it is justifiable to lie about history to advance the cause of the state. It may be in part the regularity with which such people as Miguel d'Escoto, Nicaragua's foreign minister, bend history that explains why they are not more often called to account.

During a session of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America in Managua, Henry Kissinger asked the foreign minister why the Sandinistas had supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and decided to look to the Soviet Union for foreign policy, ideology and financial aid, and why they had embarked on a massive military buildup. Father d'Escoto (he is a Maryknoll priest) claimed that Nicaragua's turn for support to the Soviet bloc was a result of U.S. aggression.

A U.S. legislator and member of the Kissinger party responded:

"Mr. Foreign Secretary, I met you a few years ago in Washington just before we voted to send money to your country—more money than in all the 20 years of your former dictatorship. I believed you when you said you were bringing in democracy. We arranged loans and financial aid to your government—through the IMF—and the World Bank. And we voted $117 million (for Nicaraguan aid) ourselves. We believed everything you told us. You looked me in the eye as one Catholic to another and said there had been no freedom in Nicaragua for five, 10 or 15 years. With the basic respect I had for you and your social concerns and your being a priest, I believed you when you promised freedom. But there is no freedom for working men in Nicaragua. There is no political freedom. I tell you, Father, speaking as a Roman Catholic, you lied to us then and you are lying to us now."

We then saw a man's internal lie detector go off. Father d'Escoto lost control for several minutes. Nervous tics rippled through his face when he found that he was before people who knew the facts and were not going to let him distort the historical record.

The U.S. did not force the Sandinistas into their military buildup. The U.S. did not encourage the Sandinistas to censor the press, install block committees, forbid free labor unions, imprison and harass their opposition and ultimately hold a sham election. We in the U.S. should not reproach ourselves for forcing the Sandinistas into Marxism and militarism—for we did not. Our error was in failing to perceive that after the revolution the Leninist Sandinistas who had the guns would set up a dictatorship and blame their betrayal of the revolution on us.

Did observers understand what it meant when Castro spoke for three hours at Daniel Ortega's inauguration? President Ortega disappeared in the shadow cast by the architect of Cuba's cruel and increasingly discredited revolution. The Nicaraguan future can be seen in the Cuban past and present: an ever-expanding military draft, service by its young men in the Soviet "Foreign Legion," an ever-worsening economy, increasing censorship and internal spying, and tightening control of all aspects of personal life.

Many citizens of the U.S. are still reluctant to accept the realities of the situation. Central Americans, on the other hand, are acutely aware of the threat on their doorsteps. When members of the Kissinger Commission met in private with high-ranking civilian leaders in Central America, we were told of their deep concern over the military buildup in Nicaragua and the massive Soviet-Cuban presence there. Without exception, these leaders agreed that the government of Nicaragua is determined to export revolution, that it imposes an increasingly repressive dictatorship on the people of Nicaragua, and that its purposes and orientation are Leninist.

In Panama, the leaders made it clear to us that the Panama Canal may well be under attack within three or four years if nothing is done to contain the situation in Nicaragua. Yet publicly, the leaders of Panama have been reluctant to speak of such a possibility.

Costa Rican leaders, both of the ruling National Liberation Party and of the major opposition party, have spoken of economic and political subversion caused by Nicaraguan infiltrators in Costa Rica, of an international Sandinista propaganda campaign against Costa Rica, and of the inability of the Costa Ricans to match Nicaraguan military might in order to defend their country from Sandinista adventurism. Yet these leaders, too, have been reluctant to speak frankly about their concerns in public.

President Suazo Cordova of Honduras spoke with the Kissinger Commission of the necessity of supporting El Salvador and of the threat to his country from Nicaragua. He has, since that time, been outspoken in his position; there is no essential difference in what he says publicly or privately. He told us:

"As far as peace negotiations are concerned, . . . how can you have rational negotiations between a belligerent and hegemonous nation—greatly superior in arms—and four nations who are militarily weak? . . . Mark my words, if El Salvador falls, Honduras and Guatemala will fall. And if that happens, one day your own capital will face the bombs of the terrorists of international communism."

Much of the distortion, confusion and misunderstanding that take place between the U.S. and Latin America could be overcome if all the democratic leaders of Central America and Latin America would speak publicly as they speak in private. If leaders would speak publicly of what the know to be true, they would certainly not find themselves alone. They would be part of a growing awareness throughout all of Latin America (and even in the U.S. Congress) that communism, because of its totalitarian intent, is the primary threat they face.

Octavio Paz, the internationally celebrated Mexican poet and diplomat, has been a severe and longtime critic of capitalism. However, Mr. Paz spoke recently in the pages of Partisan Review magazine of the "Sovietization of Nicaragua." In the article he contrasts the evils of capitalism with those of communism:

"Communism is a new form of material, political and economic domination, more cruel and more absolute than oligarchic capitalism. It is a more complete, more savage despotism than any traditional dictatorship. Capitalism has coexisted with democracy. It has deformed democracy, but it has never suppressed it. Russian communism has rooted democracy out and thus eliminated itself as a vehicle whereby all mankind might achieve freedom."

It is difficult to evade the cogency and authority of this succinct diagnosis by Octavio Paz. If, despite the natural differences that inevitably arise among free peoples, the democratic leaders of Latin America and of the U.S. can speak with a single voice on issues that go to the survival of democracy itself, the citizens of all our countries will benefit.

Mr. Silber is president of Boston University and was a member of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, otherwise known as the Kissinger Commission.

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